

The Alternate

Prologue

A pale, thin, raven-haired boy, hardly distinguishable by the dim light cast upon him by the slits provided by the door to his cupboard, closed his emerald eyes in resignation.

He had finally broken.

And it hadn't been at the hands of those Death Eaters, bent on purifying the wizarding world or kowtowing to their slimy master, nor had it been at the hands of said slimy master. But perhaps, for Harry James Potter, knowing that what would finally kill him were his own Muggle relatives hurt more than Voldemort ever could.

His body ached everywhere, his belly being the worst. When had his last meal been? It had been a whole bloody week since his uncle Vernon had lost his job and had been careless enough to stop making sure Harry sent letters to the Order. Why hadn't they come for him yet? Sirius would have been here by now, he thought bitterly, but quickly dispelled the notion from his mind. It was *his* fault that his godfather had died, and his fault that he had been forced to bear the Dursleys for one yet another summer—this one more burdensome than most. Things would have been different if Sirius was still there. At least *he* could have pleaded with Dumbledore...

Sometimes, Harry wished that there was an adult out there who loved him unconditionally and could be there for him—someone who loved him for him, and not for being the Boy Who Lived, destined to save them all. He no longer wanted to be the Boy Who Lived. The responsibility was lost to him, and if he lived through this, the wizarding world could find their own bloody savior, with or without the damned prophecy.

Shakily he listened and he waited. Still, there was not a sound, save the ominous creak of floorboards and the occasional hum of passing cars. Had his relatives just left? He had a sinking feeling in his gut as he recalled all those hushed whispers earlier that summer. Like always, they had been neglectful, never calling him by his name...and

then Uncle Vernon had come home that one night. Harry winced as he recalled his Uncle's abrupt entrance, the angry hollering; his aunt's distressed face as she pleaded with Vernon to *stop*. Harry let out a ragged breath as he tried to dispel the harsh memory from his mind...It hadn't happened—if he couldn't remember it, it hadn't happened...

The Dursley's hated Harry, but would they really leave him out for the Death Eaters to snag so easily? As Harry had learned from Dumbledore just a few weeks ago, his aunt's home afforded him protection from Voldemort, but if the Dursleys had left, could the Death Eaters have free reign?

He heard the faintest noise of a door creaking open, and he waited with baited breath. *Anything*, he convinced himself, would be better than the Dursleys— or rotting here in this closet, fated to die of starvation. He had a fleeting thought that it could be the Order, coming to rescue him! But his faith in them was lacking. What if their eyes traveled past his little cupboard and he was left forgotten? Or, what if they *did* find him in his cupboard? His mind reeled with feverish questions, but one solid resolute stood firmly in his mind. There was no way in *hell* he was ever going to forgive Professor Dumbledore for sending him back to this hellhole.

Without his thick lenses, his sight was bleary, not that he dared move from his balled-up position. Several of his ribs were broken. His wand still lay in his pocket, a reassuring force that kept him from leaping the bounds towards insanity.

He heard the booming of voices that told Harry it wasn't, in fact, the Order, nor was it the Dursleys, or the Death Eaters, which he had subconsciously feared. They neared his cupboard now, coming from the front entrance hallway.

"Benjamin!" called one voice, a feminine one, as she presumably walked by the cupboard. "It smells like a dead animal in here!" she shrieked.

A man's voice, which Harry assumed to be Benjamin's, grumbled, "But I locked all the doors, and we were only away from home for a

couple of days..." Harry stiffened and shut his eyes as the door opened, "Cathy, call an ambulance, *now!*"

Harry's world went black.

It was several days later before the same raven-haired teenager awoke in the ICU to the beeping of machines. There was a police man in his room beside his bed, looking extremely bored until he noticed Harry was awake. He immediately pressed a big red button, and waited for a nurse to come in.

The nurse glared at the police officer who didn't bother to hide his own expression of distaste. She fussed over Harry for awhile, giving him a pair of glasses and some water while freeing him from a few clear tubes. Harry suddenly understood the anxiety wizards felt when they encountered Muggle medicine. He didn't mind the nurse though, until she left him with the police officer, who looked like he could be happily employed by Lord Voldemort.

"Here's the primary rule: I ask the questions, you answer. Right now you're under heavy investigation for breaking and entering, and frankly we're all curious as to how exactly you came to be in the heavy abuse you were in. Contusions and broken ribs are not something one gets from a security system."

Harry nodded. Clearly, he was in a Muggle hospital, somewhere he apparently wasn't very welcome...

"Good, I'll begin then. Name?"

"Harry James Potter," Harry croaked out. His throat felt like sand paper.

The policeman rolled his eyes. "Sex?"

"Male?" Harry said, uncertain whether the policeman was serious or not. His mind hurt too much to think. Who were Benjamin and Cathy?

"You sure about that?"

“Yes!” he replied indignantly.

“School?”

“I go to a boarding school in Scotland—no one’s ever heard of it before really...” The policeman stiffened visibly and took notes on his clipboard.

“Parents?”

“Dead.”

“Guardians?”

“I don’t know, I think they abandoned me,” said Harry as he shifted in his seat a bit.

The police officer was frowning now, “Well, are you planning on giving me their names or do I have to research this too?”

“Er—Dursley.”

“Dursley? You wouldn’t be talking about Petunia and Vernon, now would you?” he demanded. Harry nodded stiffly. Of course this man would be friends with *them*. “Their son is out of control and we’ve about had enough of their excuses!” he fumed. Dudley had been to the police station? Harry didn’t remember that ever happening...

His eyes shifted to Harry’s, burning with rage. Being related to the Dursleys, whether people liked or disliked them; was always a bad thing. Those who could stand the Dursleys thought that Harry attended St Brutus’ Center for Incurably Criminal Boys, and those who detested the Dursleys usually had pretty good reasons to do so.

“And now their ward is causing trouble too! I’ll call them and give them a good talking to after this!”

Harry paled, “No! Please don’t!” he begged anxiously. “I know some people who’ll *want* to find me, they’re just hard to contact...” He trailed off when he remembered that he had freed Hedwig as a final futile attempt to warn the Order.

“Are you implying that your relatives won’t care that you very recently had a brush with death?”

Harry couldn’t stop himself from snorting at the irony of that statement. The policeman seemed to suddenly understand the situation, and his eyes hardened, “Yes, well, could you please tell me what happened then?”

“I don’t remember—I-I fell down the stairs,” Harry said carefully, blushing as he felt a wave of embarrassment flush through him. “Then I went to my cupboard—”

“*Your* cupboard?”

“Well it was my room until I was eleven, but after I returned from boarding school this summer things changed, and I guess they sent me back there.” The cop narrowed his eyes and wrote more stuff down.

“I couldn’t move really, and I was fairly sure my ribs were broken. I stayed there for like a week, I think it was, but after four days, there were no more noises, so I figured they went on vacation...”

Harry trailed off when he noticed that the officer had stopped writing. “We’re going to contact your relatives, and we’ll find you some help, see if we can figure out what really happened during that time, huh?”

“What do you—”

“The Dursleys do not live at number four, Privet drive. They haven’t lived there, at least, since I have been taking their son home from the police station these past couple years.”

Harry’s eyes widened as the officer left the room. What exactly did he mean by that little fib? Was it some strange new interrogation technique? And since when had Dudley been that out of line?

Harry heard his hospital door slam open as a horse-faced lady with flaky blonde hair skidded to a stop in front of his bed. She didn't speak, and there was intense scrutiny in her glare.

"I don't know what is going on here, but if this is some—some," her voice shook as she spoke, and her eyes wandered away from Harry's, "kind of sick joke from *your kind*, it is not appreciated." She hissed the last part out with so much malice that Harry had no trouble believing that she was telling the truth.

"The officer—he said you moved..."

"Six years ago, *Potter*," she spat the last name, her mouth morphing into a repulsive gag as it came out. "Oh, and you look like him too! That no good—no good—"

"Wizard?" Harry supplied, confused about just about everything at this point.

She shook her head firmly exhaling sharply as she brought her hands up to her ears. "No! I don't know what kind of trouble *your kind* want me to bail you out of, but I won't be doing any of it!"

"Listen, I-I don't know what's going on! Are you—some sort of—of—what...did Voldemort send you?" Harry demanded finally.

Petunia sent him a startled glance and backed out of the room, keeping her eyes on the crippled teenager as if afraid he might suddenly change her hair purple. She groped for the handle and when she grasped it firmly she flew out of his room, not sparing Harry a backward glance.

Harry closed his eyes and lay back onto his hospital bed. What was happening to him? Why did these types of events seem to be a reoccurring theme in his life? He groaned and thought gloomily about how right the Dursleys were about magic—that it was more trouble than it was worth. He fell into a fitful burst of sleep, wondering vaguely when the hospital planned to feed him.

“—and I hope that you can get him out of this mess, Lily, because I will not be helping you!” yelled the snotty voice of Harry’s supposed aunt as her perilous heels clacked on the linoleum floors of the hospital and the door slammed on its hinges. Harry opened his eyes and blinked a few times, trying to acclimate them to the bright fluorescent overhead lights that his aunt had turned on.

“Harry!” A very pale woman with long red hair and emerald green eyes engulfed him in a hug, causing his already sore muscles to scream in protest.

Who was this strange woman? Some witch who had somehow manage to smuggle herself in here...? Or what if...what if the Death Eaters found him here! It wouldn’t be too hard to walk into a hospital full of sick Muggles. When she pulled back from the embrace, eyes glistening as she examined his thin form, her lips pierced into a thin line. Harry noticed that his aunt had left.

“What has he done to you—in only a year? Please, Harry, you can’t go back to him...” she grabbed his left forearm, as if searching for a Dark Mark, “H-he hasn’t marked you? But our spy said...”

“MUM?!” He cried out in alarm as he realized where he had seen those same features, albeit a bit younger. The voice was one that he heard every time a dementor came near; a woman screaming to protect her child. And the appearance he recognized from the picture that he had stared at longingly when he was younger, wishing it would all just go away. Harry’s eyes went wide like saucers.

His mother was dead.

Was this some sort of cruel ploy by Lord Voldemort to drive him crazy? Harry tried to sit up and succeeded in doing so marginally, his hospital gown hardly covering his thin, bruised arms as the blankets shifted off them. His “mother” gasped in dismay, but he just closed his eyes and shook his head, propping himself up against pillows.

“Did V-Voldemort—”

“Stop it!” he cried. “I don’t know who you think you are, but you’re not my mother. My mother is dead!”

“H-how can you say that! What has he done to you?”

“Nothing! Maybe this is nothing magical after all! This is probably just a plot of his—some sort of psychological torture to put me under before killing me—”

“Harry, please, listen to me... I don’t know what Dumbledore would do if he had you—I’m fairly certain that he would—that he would turn you into the ministry,” by now fat tears were running down the woman’s face, “you’re in no shape to fight anyone now, Harry, and I can’t let you just keep hurting people. Please, come home, the last place anyone would ever expect to find you.”

“Now I know this is some sort of joke! Why in the world would Dumbledore ever put me in Azkaban? And since when were you alive? Voldemort, your plot to send me over the edge isn’t working!”

“Harry, you aren’t making any sense at all. I’m going to have to stun you...I’m so sorry,” Lily’s voice cracked at the end as she was reduced to silent sobs.

She withdrew her wand and sent a red stunner at the thin teenager. She walked to the other side of his room where there was a bin of his possessions. His clothes were tattered, bloodied rags, but his wand was different from the one she remembered buying him all those years ago. “So you changed that too, did you?” she asked quietly as she picked it out of the bag and apparated away with him to Godric’s Hallow.

Chapter 1: Maeby

Mabel Gloria Black followed her father through the carved entryway of Godric's Hollow. Her gaze wandered from the sunset that bathed the summer evening in shades of red and purple back to his stern brow. Laugh lines long forgotten from Mabel's life still lined his face.

"Listen to Christopher. He'll be able to help you if you need to find anything—" He said briskly, averting his eyes from Mabel's as if she were contagious.

"I can find it on my own!" interjected the teenager as she rolled her eyes. The wind ruffled the dark blue robes that traveled down to her feet. She shouldered her bag for a moment, trying to relieve herself of the strain that her hefty books gave.

"Fine." It was all her father said as he left her stranded on the porch. Christopher came out to greet her.

"Hey, Maeby," he said shyly. His round, grey eyes were curious, and Mabel couldn't help the rush of pity from swallowing her features. Everyone was so preoccupied with comforting Mrs. Potter that many had neglected Chris.

"Hey," she replied as she followed him inside. "So...you're starting Hogwarts next year?" she asked. It was weird for her to speak with Christopher. She hadn't seen much of the Potters since Harry had run off to join the Dark Lord a year ago.

"Yeah," he said. His voice was reluctant, and it seemed painful for him to even speak with her. "I've—well, I've got something I wanted to do, in my room, I mean..."

"Oh, it's fine..." said Maeby as she motioned to her bag, "I've got some light reading..."

Chris snorted, "Right, just some *light* reading..." For a moment Maeby was sorely reminded of Harry, or the Harry that she used to know. Her gaze followed his slow steps up the large engraved staircase.

As soon as he left her sight, however, she did not move for any of the inviting chairs of the Potter mansion. Instead, she dropped her bag in the atrium and pulled on Harry's old invisibility cloak that he had left with her before he fled, wrapping herself in its comforting embrace. Her father was not here for any tea parties; at least that much was true...

Maeby felt a thrill of adventure as she stepped out of her comfort zone and followed Mr. Potter into the grand meeting room for the Order of the Phoenix.

He sat at the end of the lengthy table beside Mr. Longbottom. Maeby grimaced when she noticed that Neville sat next to his parents with his familiar air of pompous authority that even seemed to exist amongst adults. Of course, it made *perfect sense* that she was not included in the meetings while the Boy Who Lived got center stage.

Dumbledore stood and eyed the now silent room. Maeby felt a chill travel down her spine for a moment, as the wizened old man's gaze paused when it reached her spot in the corner. It quickly returned to the Order though, and Maeby breathed a sigh of relief.

"The Order, of course, will begin now..." his voice was hoarse and shook a bit. Maeby couldn't help being a bit shocked by his sudden aging. He seemed years older in only a span of weeks, albeit three very rough ones. The room erupted in a cacophony of noise, as everyone seemed desperate to get a word in before the other.

"Silence!" demanded a very pale Professor Snape as he stood suddenly. He seemed especially angry, and his glare lingered on the Potters. A nervous and ashen Mrs. Potter looked away quickly.

"Thank you, Severus," said Professor Dumbledore. "Mr. Pettigrew, have you been able to get those documents from the ministry?"

"No, no I haven't," said a familiar man with a slight beer belly and a ruff chin. His teeth stuck out a bit, and always reminded Maeby of a hamster she had when she was five, before the sudden death of her mother.

Dumbledore furrowed his brow, “Be sure to get them soon. If the ministry is tracking our apparitioning, then who knows what of it the Death Eaters have their hands on...”

“Dumbledore? If I may...” Snape interjected.

“Please, Snape, tell us what you have found.”

“The Dark Lord has asked me to experiment a bit with...dimension hopping.” Before others could interrupt, he said loudly, “I started about a month ago, thinking my results would most likely be fruitless. However, when I had completed a potion, the Dark Lord did ask me to...” Suddenly Snape’s gaze darted towards Mrs. Potter, who didn’t seem to be paying much attention anyway, then back to Dumbledore, “test it out on an, well, *unknowing victim*...there was a certain disappearance...”

Dumbledore’s eyes widened with perception. “Yes, Severus, we’ll speak about this later. Do you have anything else...?”

“Yes,” Snape coughed. “Draco has moved from the Malfoy residence to the Black one,” Snape threw a nasty glare at Maeby’s father. “His parents are away.”

Dumbledore paused, “Where have they...?”

“I do not know, but I believe the ministry has begun listening to us, or someone in there has anyway. Perhaps the elder Malfoys are fleeing...?”

Professor Dumbledore gripped his temples and sighed. “Yes, the ministry may be turning in our direction...I suppose that is possible, Severus. We may only hope.”

“Maybe they finally have given in to our pleas!” cried Mr. Potter out of turn. “They have to listen—someone will have to figure it out eventually. The ministry will recover, as it always does.”

The headmaster shook his head. “No, James, I’m afraid you place too much faith in them—”

“Well they seem to be doing more than we have, even if they have been infiltrated by Death Eaters!”

There was some tittering, but Maeby couldn't help noticing a few people nodding. “That's enough!” exclaimed Dumbledore. “Voldemort is controlling everything—He—I, well, I've decided to take a different route in defeating him. I'm afraid this one that will take up much of my time from herein out.”

Snape looked at the headmaster curiously. “And what route—”

“No, Severus, I will tell no one of my plans. Even what we say in here is not safe...” Dumbledore's gaze lingered on Maeby, and she had the sudden sinking feeling that Dumbledore knew exactly where she was.

“Of course, Albus,” Professor Snape answered as he sat back down.

“I believe that we shall have a break now, while I speak with Professor Snape...”

The rest of the Order stood and Maeby watched as a very pale Mrs. Potter ignored her husband's concerns... “I'm fine, really,” she said as she tucked her shaking hands into the pockets of her cloak that she still wore, despite the unusually warm summer evening. “I just have to go to the bathroom,” she finished. Mr. Potter nodded as Dumbledore stood to call everyone back to attention and Mrs. Potter left silently.

The business afterwards was boring. Everything was an avalanche of bad news and disappearances that had been covered up by the ministry. Maeby's attention faltered and she started to look for a way out of this. The door opened as Mrs. Potter returned from the restroom.

“Are you sure you're all right?” questioned her husband quietly as she took a seat beside him once again. “You can leave, if you want. I'll just tell you later...”

Mrs. Potter nodded. “I-I'll just go now then...” Maeby took her cue and followed Mrs. Potter's exit through the wooden door, past Mr. Potter's

sorrowful face. She saw Mrs. Potter head for a staircase that wasn't anywhere in the direction of the master bedroom, so being the curious teenager, she followed her.

As Maeby stumbled down stairs and stairs of Godric's Hallow to one very narrow staircase, she huffed a bit and couldn't help but admire Mrs. Potter's endurance.

But then, it happened; as suddenly as it always did, Maeby felt *it* coming—the very ailment that had recently ruined her life. She tasted the rusty gook in the back of her throat, and a sudden wave of nausea overcame her. Mabel could only catch a glimpse of Mrs. Potter disappearing behind a heavy, metal door before she blacked out.

Dark, moist air hit Harry as he awoke in a cell located in what were, according to his supposed “mother,” the bowels of Godric's Hallow. Who knew that light wizarding families had dungeons?

He heard nothing but the rattling of bars a fair distance away, a sort of sad tune that came on and off periodically. At least the Death Eater had given him a bed and healed him, to an extent. She wasn't a healer, as she had told him profusely with added apologies. She wasn't much of a jail-keeper either. The bed he was lying in was far more comfortable than anything he had ever been in, even at Hogwarts.

He listened as the padlock to his cell began to rattle, and a loud clanking noise sounded as the same Polyjuiced Death Eater's oval face and button nose shone by the dampened light of her wand. When she saw that Harry was awake, the light brightened so that he could make out her familiar, fiery red hair.

She leaned in for a moment, determined to fix Harry's wounds...

“Don't touch me!” Harry cried as he tried his best to maneuver around the Death Eater's wand. “Don't you dare touch me!”

“Harry, please don’t make this harder than it already is! These injuries need to be healed! Voldemort, the ministry, even the Order can’t know you’re here. I’m trying to save you! I love you, Harry. Can’t you see that?”

Harry just stared at her blankly. Voldemort would not win this one! Whatever sick mental games were being played would not work! It was just like Voldemort to play with his food before he ate it. “You can’t win, and you never will,” he growled.

“I-I brought you food,” said Lily quietly, turning a bit in an attempt to conceal a tear that had trickled down the side of her face. She walked out of the cell and came back a few minutes later with a goblet of pumpkin juice, a plate full of eggs, and some toast.

Harry stumbled for a moment, looking at the pumpkin juice suspiciously, “Is there anything...?”

For a moment, the Death Eater seemed confused. “No—nothing! Why in the world would I poison my own *son*? *I’m trying to protect you!*”

“I know plenty of people who would want to poison me, and none of them are my *mother*,” growled Harry. “I also know a fair bit of people who love me and will rescue me from you.”

“People who—who love you? You’ve made friends with them? Harry, I don’t think they really—”

“Of course they do! They are my only family—you’ve taken away the one I *do* have!”

“I’m so sorry, Harry! You’re right! I should have spent more time with you when you were younger! Your father and I were always so busy—we both had a duty to the ministry! But this year, I’m working at Hogwarts, Harry! If you hadn’t gone and joined those Death Eaters, it could have been...”

Harry rolled his eyes, “So you’ve even made me an entire life-story? Impressive move, but I’m still not convinced.”

“What have they done to you? Could they fix it? Could Voldemort fix it?”

“Oh, yes, your *Dark Lord* could fix everything in a heartbeat; I just have to find him!” Or find a way out of this mess, added Harry silently.

“Oh, Merlin, Harry, I’m not letting you out of this cell! Do you know what James would do if he found you, even without your Dark Mark? He’d turn you in! Your own father would send you to Azkaban! Harry, he’s not letting up on these Death Eaters, and he won’t let up on you, even without the mark...”

“Right then. I’m sure in some parallel universe I’ve become a blood-thirsty Death Eater,” said Harry sarcastically, “but your dear master is going to want me alive for questioning and *real* torture because this mental stuff is *just not working*.”

The Death Eater stared at Harry in a way that made him shift around uncomfortably in his bed, before she left the room. Harry listened as the clanks of metal against metal and the light patter of her slippers died down. He closed his eyes and tried not to picture that same face that he had just seen—those tears, that hair, the voice that wasn’t screaming...What, perhaps, his life could have been like had he been raised by parents who loved him... *But she was just a Death Eater* He reminded himself fiercely. What if he was just dreaming of Bellatrix Lestrange on Polyjuice potion? Harry shivered at the thought.

But what if...what if this was some sort of dream? Or an afterlife of sorts? Was he dead?

Harry heard the rustle of his sheets and was startled out of his musings as a feminine voice breathed,

“*Lumos*.”

He looked up as a girl came into view across from him. She seemed to be no younger than Ginny, possibly even as old as Harry. It was hard to tell by the scarce light of her wand.

“Listen, Harry, I don’t know what you are doing getting caught—you *told me*—last year when you left you told me that you were leaving for

our good, but you're going to tell me *why* you left *now*, or I'll tell Dumbledore that your crazy mum has you locked up in here!" She said; her eyes pleading for something Harry couldn't supply.

It had to be another Death Eater, he thought. Her dark, black eyes held a chilling familiarity, one that sent ice-cold shivers down his spine.

"I'm sorry, but if you're part of another plot of Voldemort's—"

"Y-you said his name!" exclaimed the girl, as those same eyes that had chilled Harry just a moment before, glinted in excitement. "I told them all that you wouldn't run away to join him! That it was all so crazy!" She switched her wand hand, causing the light to waver for a moment, and used the other hand to tuck away a stray piece of thick black hair that had fallen from her messy ponytail of uneven locks. She was pale and had beads of sweat collecting on her brow.

"What?" asked Harry.

"Please, just tell me why you left! Tell me why you want to leave now, and I promise I'll help you..."

"I-I..." Harry trailed off and looked at the girl once more, the girl Voldemort was apparently using for this strange sort of 'role play.' She didn't seem too concerned with hurting him—

"Are you sick?" Harry asked suddenly.

"What? Since when did you care anyway?" she asked, quirking her pale lips into a smile. Harry nearly jumped out of his skin when the wand light revealed a very red mouth.

"Are you—is your mouth *bleeding*?" asked Harry.

"I wish..." she trailed off but then furrowed her brow when Harry frowned. "What does it even matter to you?" She demanded, as the atmosphere became denser. "You're the one who left us!"

Harry scowled. She had to be a Death Eater. She definitely sounded Slytherin enough.

"It doesn't, I guess. I don't even really know your name."

"Harry?" she asked, not entirely convinced, but she was very worried nonetheless. "You—you don't know my name? I'm fairly certain you'd know my name, even if you've been a stupid Gryffindor all your life. But you do look different, and I'm pretty sure even the *he* couldn't..."

"Couldn't what? Because right now I feel like *he* could do anything," said Harry as he shut his eyes and tried not to think about how screwed up his life was.

The girl's white, sweat-covered face illuminated itself in the enclosed cell. "No, Harry! He can't do everything. I—well, Dumbledore—he can! I know he can help. He can do the impossible—he's even helping me—"

"Dumbledore can't do anything! Dumbledore is probably the reason I'm here in the first place! He's the reason I was put with them! Why I had to resort to begging. Why I went an entire week without food—"

"Harry—I-I just don't know what you're talking about. You don't sound like the Harry I know..." She trailed off, but Harry noticed that she was still trying to speak. "I'm so-orry, it's just that—I can't—speak—well—" she panted, and Harry's eyes widened when he realized that she was having trouble talking at all, as if something were choking her lungs of air...He felt an intense bout of pity for the struggling girl. If she wasn't a Death Eater, which Harry was beginning to believe, then who exactly was she? And where the hell was he?

After a few minutes her breathing improved, and she spoke again, "I just...you don't understand, Harry, how you've affect-ted your f-family with all this. Chris used to ido-olize you...He's locked in his room right now doing Merlin knows what..." Her voice was steadily returning, "And you've just run off with some deluded thoughts in that hollow head of yours... They all think you're a Death Eater—there are witnesses, too. And do you know what the scariest part of all this has been? I think—Harry, I think, Death Eater and all, Christopher *still* idolizes you."

"Who—who is Christopher?"

“What has that mo-onster done to you?!”

“I don’t know—I really don’t know.”

The girl stopped and looked into Harry’s eyes. Her own were obscured by shaggy, chin-length hair that had mostly fallen from its pins and ponytail. She gripped the carved base her wand loosely with tired fingers. “Chris doesn’t really talk to me much, Harry, you know that? He needs his big brother because your dad’s too busy killing dark wizards, and your mum is doing whatever it is Unspeakables get up to... well, I guess she’ll be working at Hogwarts in the fall.”

“I don’t know my parents,” said Harry uneasily.

“Who do you know?” she demanded, “What *hasn’t* the—Dark Lord taken from—you? Which memo-ories hasn’t he sto-olen?”

Harry snatched her wand from her lax grip and pressed it up against the tip of her chin. The light wavered for a moment at the switch of outlets, but it eventually brightened to more than the dull light it had been before. “The Dark Lord? So he’s your master?” Harry questioned the shaking girl.

“You kn-ow about the c-urse!” reprimanded the girl, eyes flashing as she glanced down at her wand. She looked too frightened to be a Death Eater...

“No, actually I don’t. Like I said, I don’t even know your name.”

“It’s me, Harry! It’s Mae-by! Don’t you—remem-ber—me...?” Her breathing was worsening. She seemed as if she were struggling to break past some invisible barrier for air.

“Yes, yes I do. I bet you’re one of those dirty Slytherins too, aren’t you?”

“Of—co-urse I’m—not...and they aren’t...”

Harry withdrew the girl’s wand completely as he watched Maeby fall to the floor in a dead faint. He looked at her reluctantly, scared almost to leave her there without help. What if Voldemort never helped her?

Would she die here, as one of Voldemort's players? What if she wasn't even working for Voldemort...? Harry quickly dismissed the notion. This was just one of Voldemort's elaborate hoaxes, and this girl was only a part of it...

He slipped out of bed painfully and headed out the heavy door, almost certain now that this was some sort of a trap. All he could think about was getting to the Order headquarters and asking them what the bloody hell Voldemort thought he was up to this time.

Behind him Maeby stirred.

Chapter 2: Number 12, Grimmauld Place

Harry leaned against the wall of the dimly lit atrium of what was supposed to be Godric's Hallow and inhaled a ragged breath of air. The empty mansion gave off an eerie glow at that time of night, and the small flames of the sconces reflected off the pink marble floors. He closed his eyes for a moment, trying to forget his sore ribs and legs which the Death Eater had not completely healed.

He finally pulled himself together and walked to the large wooden door. He grasped the handle and pressed it down firmly. The heavy door blew open with an ease that made Harry's heart skipped a beat. No! he thought angrily as he stumbled outside onto a manicured walkway. He was almost certain now that this was a trap. Who in their right mind would let a prisoner flee this effortlessly? Voldemort—this had to be one of his Slytherin schemes.

And *why* would Voldemort go through all the trouble of obtaining Polyjuice potion, just for some mental intimidation? Why not just kill Harry and get it over with? Was this his idea of fun? Harry snorted at that last bit. Probably. Who didn't like a nice round of Torture Harry these days?

He hesitated before calling the Knight Bus when he finally reached the road. Did he really want to go to Grimmauld? Could he face Dumbledore, the man responsible for returning him to the Dursleys? He considered going to the Burrow, the only place where he knew he'd be accepted right away. Ron was like a brother to him. He was jealous, annoying, irrational, and temperamental, but nonetheless, Harry loved him unlike he loved any other living person, except for perhaps Hermione. But if this was a trap...then wouldn't he be leading Voldemort to the Weasleys?

Harry closed his eyes as he recalled what had happened to his godfather...and it was all because Sirius loved Harry, because Sirius wanted to protect him. Harry didn't want that to happen again! He couldn't imagine watching Hermione fall through the veil—or Ron, or any of the Weasleys die in front of him.

He pulled out his wand to call for the Knight Bus and drew up the hood to the midnight black robes the Death Eater had given him. He paid his toll with the spare bit of change he had stolen from the mansion he was imprisoned in and took a seat after saying, "Number 13, Grimmauld Place." He was aware that the fedelis charm would prevent the Knight Bus from finding number twelve.

Number twelve stood in all its glory, out of place in its very normal Muggle neighborhood. Its exterior was much sleeker and cleaner than Harry ever remembered it being, its outside was black and its knocker was a silver snake, coiled into a fist-sized instrument. Harry didn't remember that knocker. Perhaps it had been added? But why in the world would Dumbledore add a snake knocker for the Order of the Phoenix against an evil *snake* psychopath? Or maybe Voldemort had taken over the headquarters! But then why would Harry be able to see it? Wouldn't it be protected under the fedelis charm or some other Dark magic?

Shakily, Harry approached the door, wary of the slightly sinister plants lining the walkway that seemed responsive to more than just the sun. He climbed the steps up to the door, his knees cracking and his muscles protesting all the while. He studied the knocker, but before he touched it, he decided on a whim to try speaking to it.

"Hello?" He asked, feeling stupid. The knocker didn't reply. "Never mind..."

"I'm sorry," it said hoarsely, annunciating each word slowly. The whole ground shook when it spoke, and Harry's eyes widened. "It has been so long since there has been another speaker here."

"Has it?" asked Harry, relieved that Voldemort would not be there.

"No one has tried to speak to me for a long time...the Blacks were once gifted with speech, but that has died out among the generations."

"I thought only Slytherin was a parseltongue?"

“Many great wizarding families speak it, but it runs the strongest in Slytherin’s veins. That is why, now it is difficult to find parseltongues who aren’t of Slytherin blood.” Its voice had become less hoarse, and it seemed to be controlling it better for the ground had stopped rumbling.

“I am here to allow not only Blacks, but also Parseltongues access to their home.”

“Well, that seems like a bad idea, what with Voldemort around and everything!” The knocker was quiet for awhile.

“I do not think that Voldemort would try to harm my family,” it said simply, but its message was clear. He thought whoever was in the house worked for old Snake Face.

“Of course,” said Harry carefully, “my mistake.” This was either a seriously misinformed knocker, or Death Eaters had moved in to Grimmauld Place. Harry was severely tempted to believe the first.

“Well, can I enter?”

“Yes...I suppose I must...” the door swung open and Harry tiptoed in, remembering the portrait of Sirius’s mother that would no doubt wake the entire household of whomever if Harry made too much noise.

He reached the kitchen and relaxed marginally. It was empty. He was actually hungry too. Maybe he should grab a bite to eat? Harry nearly laughed aloud as he opened the fridge, charmed to stay cool. He found some leftover apple turnovers and grabbed a couple of those. The Death Eater’s nutritional potions may have replenished his health, but he still craved good food that he hadn’t eaten since Hogwarts let out a month ago.

He wondered at his audacity in eating food that could possibly be from a Death Eater’s hide-out. Was this stupid? Probably. Smart? Nah. Fun? Certainly. He was walking into a trap. Why not deprive the Death Eaters of a few left over turnovers? He might as well throw a few fast ones at them where they least expected it.

POP! POP! POP! POP! POP!

Harry was so startled by the entrance of five uniform-clad house elves that he dropped one of his turnovers. "Hey!" he protested as he looked down at the smashed sweet with a sense of loss.

"Master Harry!" squeaked one elf suddenly falling to his knobby knees. "What is you's doing here?" The other four elves quickly got to work cleaning the pastry and creating more.

"Oh, I um, I..." began Harry, hesitating as he looked into those wide, earnest globes of the house elf.

"Oh! Bad, Binky, bad!" exclaimed the poor elf as he grabbed a pan from a passing elf and smashed it against his already bruised forehead. "Master Harry does not have to tell me! Please forgive Binky. Binky's not knowing what you's doing here. Mistress Bella only invites family here!"

Harry's eyes widened, and his jaw set. "Mistress Bella?"

"She's coming! She must have heard Binky in kitchen! Bad, Binky, bad!" Harry heard the tiptoe of feet down stairs then the creak of a door.

"*Potter*," sneered a very familiar aristocratic drawl that was *not* Bellatrix Lestrange at all. Harry shot Binky an annoyed look before glaring at the shadows where he knew Draco Malfoy was concealed.

"Malfoy," he replied angrily, grinding his teeth at his classmate who very well could have been a Death Eater. "Having a good time at your auntie's place?"

The blond stepped out of the shadows of the stairwell and into the kitchen's light. "Not really. It's dull as hell here. At least at the manor I had your company, even if you are an annoying Gryffindor."

His grey eyes were piercing and honest, and Harry had a hard time believing any of it wasn't true. There was silence between them. The roll play had apparently transferred all the way over to Grimmauld, and Harry was beginning to think this wasn't roll play at all... but what was it then? What else could it be? Was he going insane? Was this an afterlife of sorts? Or maybe he was dreaming—or hallucinating?

“Why—why’d you do it? I mean, I understand the whole—the whole *family obligation* thing from my side I guess, but the way you talk about your family, Potter, it doesn’t sound like...it just doesn’t sound like you have much motivation there...”

Harry stayed silent, trying to find a way out of this mess...

“And I mean—you just disappeared! You deserted us! How in Salazar’s name did you do that, Potter! We were arguing in anti-apparation wards made by the Dark Lord himself, and then—*poof!*—you’re gone...”

He heard more footsteps, “Draco?” There was no mistaking Lestrangle’s purr.

“Shit!” exclaimed Malfoy as he looked at Harry with panicked eyes. “I can’t give you to her...you’ll—the Dark Lord will—” Harry would have laughed at the younger Malfoy had he not been so desperate for escape. He stuffed the rest of the turnovers in his pocket and ran out the kitchen door and into the atrium. But the moment he entered, the lovely voice of Sirius’ mother filled his ears.

“INDTRUDER! Half-blood!! Bella, you’ve let a half-blood in my house! IF MY SECOND SON WAS HERE, HE’D—”

“*Stupefy!*”

The rest of her sentence was cut off as Harry’s world once again went black.

“*Enervate.*”

Harry woke in a fairly well-lit parlor this time, his sore body painfully splayed across the couch, his arms tied behind him in rough bindings. He looked up into the unforgiving black depths that were Bellatrix Lestrangle’s eyes.

He felt a surge of hatred course through his veins. He wanted to rip her to shreds. He wanted to kill her, to hurt her—to *destroy* her. She

killed Sirius. She was the reason he had been left with the Dursleys again, why no one had come to rescue him, why he had been reduced to begging on his knees... and why he'd never again see his godfather.

For a moment she seemed taken aback by his hatred, but that didn't last long. She began pacing, as if deep in thought.

There was something different about her that Harry recognized. She looked to be about his mother's age, but that was about the only thing they had in common. She didn't seem as insane as he remembered...her rough black hair was neat and tied back in a fancy twist of sorts, her eyes were calculating and intelligent, and the wrinkles were scarcer on her pale face.

"Talk to me, Harry. Tell me why I should not turn you over to the Dark Lord," said Bellatrix lightly, but there was something else there, some sort of hidden meaning in her words that Harry couldn't interpret. Why did Lestrage have to be the one that wanted *him* to talk? He didn't have a clue what was going on!

Harry didn't speak, and he felt rather than saw Bellatrix slap him. Hard. His jaw ached now too. He wanted to rub his throbbing jaw, but his hands were still tied. Something really screwy was going on here. People couldn't just get rid of wrinkles and age marks, could they? They couldn't change their personality—as if, as if they had never even been to Azkaban...

Bellatrix laughed now, except it wasn't the loud and throaty one he was used to; no, it was low and melodic, almost hypnotizing. "Remember, Harry? That *amazing* day when I recruited you, you said you'd always be loyal to us—that you'd never turn back, and do you know what?" She paused for dramatic effect. "I believed you—I believe you."

She had gotten too close for his liking now, and was stroking his cheek almost lovingly. He felt bile begin to rise in the back of his throat but quickly swallowed it.

"Listen, Lestrage, I don't know what—"

“Lestrangle? He died—” She paused, backing away from Harry suddenly.

“Lestrangle isn’t dead! He’s your husband! You’ve both escaped from your little cells in Azkaban!”

She tilted her head to one side and carefully observed Harry. “Damn! I knew you weren’t strong enough to get through those wards! They must have tested it on *you!*” She was laughing now, her eyes full of mirth as she casually shot a full body bind out at Harry. Her amusement only fueled his anger as he struggled helplessly against his new bindings.

“The Dark Lord will be able to fix this though! *I want my Harry back!*” she cooed, but she seemed relieved at the same time.

“Fix what?!” asked Harry.

“But haven’t you realized?” asked Bellatrix. “My Harry’s trapped in your universe!”

And just like that, this Harry James Potter was in the Death Eaters’ clutches once more.

Lily Potter looked at Albus Dumbledore nervously when he held her afterwards to ask her what was wrong. How exactly could she tell him that she had an alleged Death Eater in her dungeons, and she let him escape? But it would probably be easier to find him now rather than later. Did she want her son to be found? Well of course she did! She didn’t want him hurting other people’s sons, but...

“Lily, what is it that distresses you?”

“I-I—” she stopped herself from giving Harry away mid-sentence. How could she betray him like that? The ministry would send him to Azkaban, or worse, give him to the dementors. Albus’ eyes looked old and wrinkled with large bags underneath them as if he hadn’t slept a full night in years. She needed to trust him—she needed to believe

that he wouldn't be wrong about how to deal with Harry, even though he had been wrong about him having the Dark Mark.

"Harry—" she began, and Albus' eyes turned to full alert, causing her to hesitate a bit. What made her son so valuable? Why wasn't she told as much as others in the Order? "He's escaped—I found him last night and put him in the dungeons. I don't know how, someone must have helped him out of his cell or something. The front door would have opened for him though, since he's of Potter blood." Her voice shook at the end. Dumbledore's head had dropped, and he was rubbing his eyes. "Please, Albus, find him but have mercy! He doesn't have the Dark Mark! Snape was wrong."

Albus' eyebrows furrowed, "He doesn't have the Dark Mark?"

She shook her head.

"Lily, I'm disappointed in you."

"I know," she said quietly, her head dropping in defeat. Would he arrest her for aiding a fugitive?

"But I understand why you did it," he lifted her chin and looked her into the eyes. "I'll find your son, who you claim is not marked, before I lose his trail. I believe, Lily, it is time that you accepted the fact that he is a Death Eater, even if someday he may be...redeemed. We just can't take the chance now, in the middle of the war. I won't let them give him the kiss, but if he is, in fact, a Death Eater, then I'm afraid that I must..."

Lily let out a heart-wrenching sob as Dumbledore left, giving one last pat to the redhead's back. When the old man reached the hallway, no one saw him take a shuddering breath and use his robes to wipe away the fog that had collected on his glasses. He shut his eyes and ignored the loud sobs coming from the room he had just exited. He needed to move on. He needed to prevent Harry Potter from taking more innocent lives...

But did that mean turning him into the ministry? He thought long and hard before finally deciding to only call up the Order for this mission. There was no need to get the ministry involved yet.

Chapter 3: An Alternate Harry Potter

“So you want us to hunt down that murderer without the ministry?” demanded a surly Sirius as he dragged himself in front of Dumbledore’s desk. James did the same. They had received the memo via owl from Albus asking them to ‘*Please find Harry who has escaped the hold at Godric’s Hallow recently.*’

Apparently, Albus had been hoping to avoid this particular confrontation.

Dumbledore sighed, walked around his desk, and placed one of his old, wrinkled hands on James’s shoulder before speaking, “That is precisely what you must do. I have business of my own to attend to, but as qualified aurors you should be able to track a boy who is hardly sixteen—”

“*As qualified aurors* we have duties to the ministry!” exclaimed Sirius. “Duties to arrest murderous Death Eaters who are wandering around our houses and throw them in Azkaban, or better, give them the kisses they deserve!”

There was a silence in which Sirius’ last words echoed through the head’s of all three. James looked at his feet, determined not to betray a hint of emotion.

Dumbledore backed away from the two and closed his eyes to calm himself before speaking. “Please, you do not mean what you are saying. You have a duty to the *Order*! Don’t forget that! And, James, what would your wife say if she heard you two speaking about your son like this?”

James seemed to be even more affected by that statement, and he stuttered a moment before turning to an angry Sirius. “We have to find him, Sirius, before the ministry does.”

“But, James—”

“It’s not for us to decide anyway. We’re just following Albus’ orders. Any suggestions on where to start?”

“I suggest,” began Dumbledore, though disappointment shone in his eyes at James’s defeated tone, “that you start with transportation. Apparition, Floo—”

“What about the Knight Bus?” suggested Sirius reluctantly as he shifted some thick black hair from his brow. James sent him a questioning glance. “It’s just what I used when I ran away from home, as a teenager...”

“And that’s exactly what young Mr. Harry Potter is—a *teenager*! It’s why we must be careful not to hasten in turning him into the harsh hands of the ministry when for all we know; we could just have a rather severe case of rebellion on our hands.” Albus hesitated a moment before continuing, “That seems rather implausible, but your wife thinks otherwise. You should speak with her, James. Perhaps Voldemort has an extra interest in tarnishing the reputation of young Harry?”

“And why exactly would Lord Voldemort want to ruin the reputation of our Harry?” asked James doubtfully, a smirk playing on his lips at the notion. “He’s gone and ruined it pretty damn well himself.”

“I do not know that, Mr. Potter. I’m missing a large part of Voldemort’s plans, and what motivates him—he hides himself well enough. Regardless, your idea about the Knight Bus, Sirius, is excellent. Maybe you should split up and cover more ground? I’m sorry I cannot spare more Order members for this operation. It needs to stay quiet—and you know about the leak...”

“Oh, I do,” said Sirius dangerously.

“It’s not her, Sirius. I can assure you of that. After all, how would she come about such information? How do you presume she would be able to spy on our meetings? If you spoke with Mabel at all, you might be able to better understand her.”

“I’ve been busy...”

"I have spoken to her, on occasion, and I know that she is very distressed that her own father will not give up any moments to speak with her."

"Doesn't she know that I just need more..time?"

"No, she doesn't. It's been over three months, Sirius." Dumbledore sighed once more. His normally soft temper was on the edge that night, as it had been for the past week or two. Things weren't looking up for the Order.

"Is she safe?"

"I have been working with her, to the best of my abilities...But we will speak about it later, Sirius. James, you must find your son before he slips too far from our grasps."

"Of course, Dumbledore, anything for the Order," said James.

"For the Order," affirmed Sirius, as he and James left Dumbledore's office.

Albus sighed and sat back down, putting his head in his hands. This couldn't end well.

Sirius Black grinned wolfishly at James when he looked toward the gap between Grimmauld 11 and Grimmauld 13.

"So it's under the fedelis?" James asked curiously. Sirius Black only shook his head and smiled harder, his eyes crinkling under the strain. "Okay, mate, now you're scaring me..."

"This is the Black residence," said Sirius, swiftly checking to see if there were guards.

"And so...it isn't under the fedelis? We can get in? Sirius, can I get a decent sentence out of you?!"

“No, the house is not under the fedelis, but it only lets Blacks in—I’m sure Voldemort has had quite a bit of trouble with it. It’s supposed to be a safe house, I think, but the Blacks have taken up residence there these past thirty years or so.”

“So you know how to get in?” asked James, clearly frustrated by his somewhat crazy friend.

“I’ll be able to walk right in like I live there. The only ones stopping us are the Blacks inside the house.”

“Bellatrix Black,” said James, his throat closing up as he thought about facing her.

“Oh, and that’s not all. There’s also her sister, Narcissa Malfoy—”

“I hardly think her sister is someone we need to worry about!”

“Well then, what about that other one, her offspring, little Malfoy junior?”

“He’s still attending Hogwarts! The only one of them we have to worry about is her husband—”

“And I don’t think he could enter. He’s not related closely enough,” said Sirius.

“Well, then, I guess you have to sneak in there alone?” asked James, suddenly understanding Sirius’ grin.

“Oh, yes, this is all me.”

“I don’t think—”

“No, I’m the only one who is able to breach those wards. I can do this!” said Sirius confidently.

“But is Harry really worth it?”

“It’s for the Order, James, I think you’re forgetting that.”

Somewhat cannon world that the other Harry is in...

“Vampires...” A falsetto voice in Harry’s memory wavered, “feed on the planets—the stars, the moon, the sun, the sky...”

“We harvest them when they align properly—and then only. On those nights do they fear us; on those nights do wizards and witches flee from us....” continued a different, more throaty voice, “for on that night,”

“We change,” finished the falsetto as he emerged from the shadows.

“Why—why are you telling me this—I have to get home...” said Harry as he attempted to back out of the alley, away from the cloaked figures and the man with the high-pitched voice. He had been on his way home from summer quidditch when they had ambushed him—a large group of black-robed figures. They weren’t Death Eaters without their silver masks, and the night hid their faces from his view.

“Because tonight, is that night.”

“I, I have to go home...”

“Oh, when we’re done with you, you won’t want to go home,” said the falsetto in an alluring voice, as he withdrew his hood to reveal chalky white skin, red pupils and, when he grinned manically, a set of very sharp teeth, every one as pointed as the last.

Harry closed his eyes and screamed his lungs out, hoping that someone nearby may hear him as the beast’s teeth descended on him...

Harry James Potter awoke in a cupboard that smelled strongly of mortal blood with a pounding headache. When he looked around, he noticed small worthless trinkets and a sad sign reading “Harry’s Room” that was drawn with crayons.

“Good one, Malfoy,” Harry grunted, rolling his eyes as he stumbled off the cot and stretched his stiff back in the small space he had. The last thing he remembered was arguing with Draco at the Manor... Except,

when Harry left the cupboard, he noticed he definitely wasn't in the Malfoy Manor anymore. The hallway he stood in was stripped of all pictures or decorum, and when he stumbled toward the door, he noticed the window from the living room.

Outside there were a neat row of brick houses, each with the same Muggle cardboard box design with plain, undecorated windows and blinds, all of them shut.

"Maybe I have underestimated you, Malfoy..." he wondered aloud as he slipped his fingers up the hem of the sleeve of his robe, and traced the enflamed outline of the Dark Mark.

He no longer had to be a weak and powerless vampire, without the magic that was taken from him at his changing. He was no longer a wizard, no matter how much it hurt him to say it. He wasn't. He could never use magic. Vampires had many strange abilities he had never thought himself capable of, but magic wasn't one of them. He had to use his shifting capabilities through the Mark instead of apparating.

He felt the Dark Mark burn and was about to press his thumb to it and respond when—

A door creaked open.

"What—? Bella, the house is empty! The Dark Lord will have both are necks for this. We must not displease him once more..." a very familiar voice whispered.

Mr. Malfoy! Bella? Harry, unknowingly rushing head-on into danger, went into the empty kitchen where the voices were coming from. Sure enough, two heads popped up into his view. Bella was shutting the door behind her as she entered the house behind Mr. Malfoy.

"Potter!" said Mr. Malfoy, his tone cloaked with distaste as he drew his wand.

"Mr. Malfoy?" Harry replied, relieved.

"Is he delirious? Why in Salazar's name is he so pleased to see us?" drawled Bella as she wandered into Harry's view.

Harry gasped. "What happened? Bella, what happened to your face—your hair..."

Bellatrix scowled fiercely and was about to retort, but Mr. Malfoy held a hand up to stop her. "No, the question is not what happened to Bella, but what happened to you." Harry sent them a startled glance. "You see, we came here expecting to find Harry Potter, but you are not Harry Potter."

"I'm not?" Harry asked at the same time as Bellatrix said, "He's not?"

"No, you don't have his scar. It's clear that someone has attempted to use Polyjuice here, although why? ...Are you Dumbledore, attempting to infiltrate headquarters perhaps?"

"What scar?"

"Well, then if you want to play it like that... you look to have gained at least thirty or forty pounds in three weeks—"

"Hey!" *Why was Lucius being to rude?*

"And you've grown at least a couple inches taller... This is some bad Polyjuice potion you're using," he added, gripping his wand tighter.

"What in the world are you talking about? I saw you yesterday! See, here's my Dark Mark!" Harry pulled up his sleeve and showed the two Death Eaters his Dark Mark.

There was a shocked silence. "So the Dark Lord has..." began Bella, but she was cut off by an explosion of sorts.

"The Order has arrived! Quickly, if you claim he's your master you'll come with us," said Bella as she grabbed Harry and side-apparated with him.

Harry arrived on his feet beside Bellatrix and Lucius in a dark and grimy dungeon.

“What are we doing here?”

Bellatrix laughed, but Lucius was pale, “He’s not Harry Potter...”

“You must wait the night until the Dark Lord returns,” explained Bellatrix as she twirled her wand. “Meanwhile...”

“No, the Dark Lord said we must not torture him—”

“Torture me? Mr. Malfoy, it’s me, Harry! Bell—”

“Come, Bella, I believe you promised Draco a round of wizard’s chess.”

“But, Lucius, surely you’re not—” she stopped when she realized the intensity of Lucius’ gaze and glanced back at Harry again. “If you really think so...”

They left a very confused Harry in the leaky dungeons alone.

Harry looked around at the moldy décor of the grand hall. *Well this is a change*, he nearly thought aloud. They must have switched headquarters without telling him. Harry suddenly felt very cold when he realized what that could mean. But wasn’t he one of the Dark Lord’s favorites now? Then again, how many of Voldemort’s favorites spent as long as he had trapped in a musty old dungeon?

“Well if it isn’t Harry Potter!” said a snake-like voice that startled Harry from his gloomy thoughts. So we’re back to this then? Harry thought sullenly.

“M’Lord,” said Harry carefully as he kneeled and kissed the hem of Lord Voldemort’s robes. The Dark Lord made no motion for him to stand, so Harry stayed on his knees and kept kissing the Dark Lord’s robes. Usually, the Dark Lord would pull him up before he even got a chance to kneel. Something was wrong. When Lord Voldemort ignored people...things didn’t end well for them. Harry was rightfully scared.

Finally, after what felt like hours, the Dark Lord pulled Harry up.

“My servants are missing. Bella and Lucius are gone. They have not been loyal to me, but I find it curious that they would flee after catching you, *Harry Potter*.”

He was pacing now in front of Harry. He turned suddenly, grabbing Harry’s chin and forcing him to look him in the eye. Harry felt the push of a Legilimency against his shields. Harry let them down and watched as a swarm of his own memories surrounded him. Without speaking, the Dark Lord greedily reached for the darkest...

It was twilight. A fire glowed in the middle of a forest, and Harry sat before it, a surge of revenge and anger overwhelming him. It had been nine months since he had become a vampire and seven since he had joined the Dark Lord. He didn’t want to be weak anymore—he didn’t want to be that stupid Gryffindor who ran away from home because he thought his family would never accept him. He wanted to be powerful—to prove to the Dark Lord that he was loyal, not a fool to be tolerated.

But most of all, he wanted his powers. It was only his second night as a vampire, as those nights did not happen frequently. The first night a couple months ago he had cowered away in his locked room, unaware that ‘vampire powers’ depended on human blood, even if you just had to take one victim in your life. So tonight he was going to take someone, preferably a lowlife from the streets.

As the last rays of light vanished, so did Harry’s reasoning. Pain overtook his body as the transformation started. His heart began to beat erratically—Harry started screaming—his heart stopped altogether...and his teeth changed, all of them becoming predatory and sharp. His eyes, instead of becoming a dark red, like the vampire who bit him, became pink, a vestige of his bright green eyes still visible behind them.

And when he blinked, he realized quite suddenly that other vampires had come and one of them was familiar.

Harry immediately charged the vampire who started all the pain in his life, not holding any reason in his new, now ravenous vampire mind.

But all of a sudden, he stopped. His arms and legs just wouldn't heed to his command. His eyes locked with the falsetto in surprise.

"How did you do that?" he found himself asking.

The other vampires laughed. "But don't you know?" asked the falsetto. "Haven't you or your master researched us?"

Harry's eyes widened in surprise, and he gaped like a fish, "How old are you?" Immediately he felt embarrassed, and the other vampires laughed louder. Harry looked around and realized that there were women there too.

"Tisktisk, didn't your mother ever tell you it was rude to ask a vampire his age?"

"My mother never told me anything about vampires," said Harry.

"Well, most wizarding families are as clueless as Muggles," said a woman who emerged from the shadows shaking her head. She had silver hair that fell just past her shoulders, and her wizened eyes were maroon, even darker than the falsetto's

"Mother, what a pleasant surprise," said the falsetto, as he discretely freed Harry.

"Nerph, I told you not to torment new vampires, especially ones who have been made so unwillingly."

"He's only new, he'll get used to it. We're just showing him the ropes. I was planning on taking him on a night on the town."

"Is that so?" asked 'mother' "Should I come as well then?"

"Nah, you'll just get bored. The nightlife is no place for old ladies such as yourself."

She chuckled, but her face showed no sign of amusement. "Watch yourself, boy," she hissed at Nerph as she slipped back into the forest.

The crowd of vampires looked to Nerph nervously. “Well, you all know us ‘kids’ have a different definition of night on the town...we won’t be meeting up with any other packs tonight. We’ll have to train our new one—he’ll need the blood anyway to get his powers.” Harry glanced around the circle and noticed a few other newer recruits with pink eyes like Harry’s just joining them now. They made an effort to avoid looking at him though.

Harry had trouble organizing his thoughts, even without a trace of mortal scent for miles around. The older vampires had more self-control. “Hood up,” commanded Nerph, and everyone obeyed. Even Harry didn’t dare disobey the intimidating vampire. What happened to his idea of power? Even in the form of a vampire, Harry was nothing. “Someone help the newborns along, will you? I don’t believe they can shift yet...”

“But—Master—where are we going?” asked a younger one carefully.

“Why, we’re going to Godric’s Hollow, of course.”

Harry had tears running down his face now, and he cried out—**“NO!”**—Voldemort let go of his chin roughly. Harry felt a surge of relief rush through him. He wouldn’t have to go through the rest of that again... But now that he was really looking at his master, and as his mark began to burn, it dawned on him.

“You’re not Harry Potter,” hissed the man with slits for nose angrily.

“And you’re not Lord Voldemort,” said Harry shakily.

He pressed his thumb on his mark and shifted to his *real* Lord.

Switching dimensions again...

Sirius Black was not subtle—he was a Gryffindor, after all. But he outsmarted his dear Slytherin cousin Bellatrix by doing the one thing she least expected, even from a ministry auror—walking through the front door. He put a cloaking spell on himself and crept along the hallway.

—*crash!*—the umbrella stand behind him tipped over and startled him.

Malfoy stepped into the hallway.

“Hello?” his voice was shaky, and his clothes nearly as carelessly done as his hair. “Mrs. Black? Did you hear that?”

“Yes, it was the umbrella stand—someone has knocked it over!”

Malfoy squinted at the spot where Sirius stood, several yards away.

“Is that...? Is there someone standing there?” he asked stupidly, drawing his wand.

Sirius sent a stunner at him before he could find out.

“BELLATRIX!” roared the portrait as Sirius’s form emerged from the spells, “You’ve done it again! You’ve let traitors into my home!”

Sirius didn’t care anymore about Malfoy’s spawn or the screaming portrait, he just wanted to destroy Bella, maybe grab Harry, and *get out*. Had he been focusing a bit more, he might have realized that the portrait had immediately *stopped* her moaning.

When he burst into the dining room and saw Lord Voldemort sitting at the head of the table in all his glory, Sirius sagged quite a bit. “Damn it!” he cursed aloud. Voldemort just laughed.

Sirius drew his wand, even though he knew his chances were hopeless. How was he to face *the* Lord Voldemort? He could see the light at the end of the tunnel approaching...

Voldemort finally spoke, “Well, then, you’re Sirius Black, all grown up!” His tone was chilling, yet familiar, as if they were about to have a cup of tea. His head had a rich coating of black hair on it. His cheek bones were high, aristocratic ones, and his lips were thin and cruel.

“Draco and Bella should be joining us soon,” he said casually, but Sirius knew what that meant.

“And my brother?” he found himself asking.

Voldemort's face hardened and his eyes examined Sirius for a moment. "You really don't know, do you?" His voice held amusement, but Sirius had an idea that it wasn't amusing at all, that Regulus was very much dead. "Oh, yes. I killed him years ago when he betrayed me."

"He what!?" Sirius' eyes widened, but Voldemort looked angry now.

"They're a simple concept—*traitors*—and they burn the core of your little group of birds. If you wish to live, let us speak about something else."

"Sure," said Sirius, but his voice was an octave higher than before. "You're the man."

Voldemort chuckled. "You remind me of Harry," he said mournfully. "I wonder..." He got up and left. When he came back, he was in the company of Bellatrix and the Malfoy spawn. "May I have your mark, Bella?" though Sirius noticed that Draco sighed in relief. "I'm just going to try calling our Harry. I'd give you this other one that we found, but he could prove useful to my research." He pulled out his long, white wand and pressed it against Bella's Dark Mark.

Sirius looked at them strangely.

"You won't be living long enough to bring the other one home anyway. He doesn't happen to be a Death Eater, though. If he wakes up soon, you can interrogate him, Bella."

Then he paused. He furrowed his thin eyebrows and asked quietly, "Where did you put him, Draco?"

"In the first guest bedroom," answered Draco reluctantly.

"*Crucio!*" Voldemort cried out in anger and Draco fell to the floor screaming. Sirius shivered for the boy. So he had tried to protect Harry, who had had some sort of a falling-out with his master....?

Sirius felt a tug at the back of his pant leg and noticed a hand snaking itself around the doorframe and into his view, trying to get him to make a break for it. Not waiting for another cue, he slowly walked

backwards, glad that Bella was busy enjoying with sick pleasure the torture being inflicted on her nephew. When he reached the hallway, he felt an invisibility cloak being thrown over him. Sirius thought immediately that this was the work of James, and he regretted his harsh comment before.

When he got under though, he noticed there was another form, a skinny boy, struggling to stand upright in Tonks's hold, who was grinning wildly at Sirius. At first, he thought it was Harry, but as his eyes adjusted, he realized the differences; the emerald eyes looked slightly haunted, unlike they had been a year ago, his face appeared almost gaunt, and he seemed to be much thinner as well. How could a growing boy lose weight? Sirius' face hardened though, and he shook his head at Harry, turning to Tonks instead.

"Is that—" Began Sirius but he stopped when Tonks put a finger to her lips, as they heard Draco's screams subside and Voldemort ask for Sirius.

"I searched the bedrooms, and he was just lying there, begging me to take him away," whispered Tonks as they hurried out the door.

"James must've gotten his cloak back," said Sirius, but he noticed that Tonks didn't answer. Instead, she nodded vaguely. When they got outside, they apparated home, bringing the frail boy with them.

Had they bothered to wonder why Voldemort had not come running after them, they may have noticed the sudden silence that filled the Black mansion, or they might have been curious enough to take one last peak... They may have realized that for a brief moment, both Harry Potters were in the same house, at the same time, in the same dimension.

Meet the Alternates

Harry let out a startled yelp as his world twisted and his lungs squeezed, as if he were being stuffed through a tube. He landed on solid ground and ripped away from Tonks's firm hold. The invisibility cloak had shifted off them in the process of their transport, and the brown, silky cloak now lay visible on the dusty dirt pathway that lead to Godric's Hallow.

"What are you trying to do to me!" he exclaimed, his eyes wild as he desperately searched for even a spark of recognition from the pink-haired woman. But he knew she didn't know him—when she had saved him from Grimmauld, Tonks hadn't even recognized Harry. He was in a different dimension...

"It—it was just Apparition! I thought you wanted to get out of there!" she said, stepping back from Harry and looking at her wand with a tired expression. She picked up the cloak and slipped it into her bag.

Sirius appeared behind them with a loud crack. Startled, Harry jumped into the air and looked carefully at this other man, this alternate Sirius, who appeared angrier even than when they had escaped. Harry's stomach seemed to be plunging down to the dirt pathway, deeper and deeper by the second. His heart burned, and he couldn't help but briefly close his eyes, as if that might take away the pain of it all.

Harry looked past his pseudo godfather and admired the large brick mansion that was Godric's Hallow. At night, it had seemed imposing and slightly sinister even, but now, in the mid-afternoon light, it finally felt more like a home; what could have been his home.

"Potter!" Harry jumped as heard Sirius's gruff cough. He followed the two alternates up a pathway that was lined with flowers, which seemed to almost sing, and a green, green grass that glowed, even with the overcast skies. Harry couldn't help but wonder at how difficult it was to garden such a place.

They entered the house quietly. An imposing staircase towered upwards in the great atrium, with pink marble floors and carved stone walls.

“Should we tie him up?” wondered Tonks aloud. Her voice echoed off the high ceiling. Sirius was pasty and pale. He nodded but walked straight up the stairs ahead of Tonks.

“Okay...” Tonks glanced at Harry nervously. “I guess I’ve got this one. *Incarceras!*” Snake-like ropes shot from the tip of her wand and wound themselves loosely around Harry’s wrists.

Harry followed Tonks and ascended the towering stairs. His legs were still sore and untreated, so he was forced to take one step at a time.

“They’re in there,” said Tonks apprehensively, more to herself than to Harry. “I shouldn’t be at this meeting...”

The door opened and the noise grew as Dumbledore stepped out. When he shut the door, the hallway went quite again.

There was a silence in which he glanced from Harry to Tonks, his eyes examining each carefully. “Nymphadora, you will be invited to these meetings in the future.”

She nodded and sighed in relief. Her pale face began to regain color, as she headed for the wooden door behind Dumbledore. Harry followed closely behind her, but when he got to the door, Dumbledore stopped him for a moment.

“I don’t believe this will be a good idea.” He spoke carefully, and the doubt in his voice startled Harry. “But we don’t seem to have a choice...”

“What do you mean—” Harry began irritably.

He was cut off when the ropes that bound him disappeared, and Dumbledore opened the door to let him inside. The large meeting room silenced at Harry’s entrance, and he couldn’t prevent his gaze

from wandering over the familiar faces that weren't his; that didn't belong to the real people he loved.

Mr. and Mrs. Weasley sat in the corner. Their eyes were glued to Harry's, wide and nervous. His gaze melted over the group, until they found Sirius, sitting next to an older man with graying dark raven locks, a heavy, worn face, and nervous hazel eyes. He stared back at Harry tensely.

"Dad," Harry whispered.

Dumbledore had been talking to the room, but he paused when he noticed Harry's outburst. He gripped his hands on Harry's shoulders, and Harry forgot about his father.

A roaring and inexplicable anger filled him as he was overcome with the desire *to throw Dumbledore's hands off* his broken shoulders. He remembered why he was there; why everything was changed. Why the Dursleys raised him in the first place.

Snape stood abruptly, startling Harry from his resentment. "It worked!" he exclaimed, his eyes hectic. Harry scowled at the black-robed man angrily. This was the man responsible for Sirius's death.

"Yes, as I had been saying before Harry came, it did work."

"Mr. Potter," began Dumbledore. Harry felt a bit startled as the headmaster called him by his surname. "It would seem that you already know about your...situation. Am I correct to assume so?"

Harry nodded.

"And am I correct to assume that you are not a Death Eater?"

Harry nodded again. There was a silence in which Harry noticed that his father's eyes had found the scar that marked his forehead.

"I'll go ahead and introduce you to everyone." People moved around in their seats uncomfortably.

“Just how much do you want to tell him?” demanded Sirius as he stood suddenly. His sneer rivaled Snape’s. “Yes, give him all the names of the Order members in the inner circle. What could the Death Eater possibly do with that information?”

The Order members, who had been casting Sirius hopeful glances, sighed as they shook their heads sadly.

“Mr. Black, you are aware that this Harry is not a Death Eater?”

“Oh, and all you have is his word!” Sirius exclaimed.

“No, Mr. Black. You and Nymphadora have missed our discussion earlier. But do you remember, from the full Order meeting? We have Severus’s word as well.” Sirius snorted, but Dumbledore ignored it. “You do recall that Severus had been experimenting with potions concerning dimension hopping...? And that he had tested it on someone, by Lord Voldemort’s demands?”

Sirius shook his head savagely as he sat back down. “It’s a set up...” he mumbled.

“Well, Mr. Potter, we are in unfamiliar territory. Professor Snape is working to find an antidote to his mistake, but I am afraid that it might take some time.”

“I—I’ll be going back?” Harry asked suddenly. The thought that he would or wouldn’t be able to go back hadn’t occurred to him. Everything seemed so dreamlike in this dimension, like he could just wake up, and it would all be over—he wouldn’t even remember.

“You will,” affirmed Dumbledore confidently, though the twinkle had all but disappeared behind those half moon glasses.

He looked around the room before pointing at each member and introducing them.

“These are the Weasleys, who you seem to already know,” they ducked their heads in a silent greeting, “the Longbottoms, who I am sure you have met once or twice,” Harry glanced up at the two small faces that he recalled from the Order picture, “and, of course,

Professor Severus Snape.” He scowled at Harry, who didn’t bother to avoid showing his own distaste.

“I see that there have been likewise unfortunately no changes on that front... This is Nymphadora Tonks, who you’ve met on your way here; and Kingsley Shacklebolt of the ministry, Alastor Moody, a retired Auror, Sirius Black, your godfather, and, James Potter,” Dumbledore paused, “your father.” Harry eyed his father anxiously. James fidgeted in his seat, finally resting his chin in his hands and turning away slightly. Harry noted that his mother wasn’t sitting next to his father.

The door swung open as a rounder man flurried with a stack of papers bustled inside the spacey meeting room. “I’ve got them!” he exclaimed. He blushed when he saw the meeting. “Oh, sorry I’m late,” he mumbled as he placed the papers down on the long, narrow table and turned to face Dumbledore and Harry. “W-what...” His beady eyes widened in fear as he noticed an enraged Harry.

“Peter Pettigrew, meet Harry Potter, the dimension hopper.”

Harry had already struggled madly out of Dumbledore’s grasp. His fingers absently searched for his missing wand as he stuttered, “H-he’s a Death Eater! Dumbledore, you have to catch him! No...” Harry trailed off when he realized that Dumbledore was staring at him firmly.

Peter Pettigrew had turned dark red, and his alarmed eyes wandered to James’s hazel ones. He quickly turned away from the long table of Order members. He faced the wall, covered in goofy pictures of the four Marauders.

“Mr. Potter, I hope that you will not assume prejudices in this dimension against people, as we are not holding your status against you.”

Pettigrew turned and gazed at Harry, confused. “He’s from—”

“It would seem that the potion Professor Snape tested on Harry was, in fact, entirely effective. The Harrys have switched dimensions.”

“So...he’s not a Death Eater anymore?” Pettigrew asked. A few people tittered, and James refused to look at Pettigrew at all.

“No, it would seem as if he was not a Death Eater. Now, you came late because...”

“I—I have the papers, Albus,” he explained as he gathered the stack together and offered them to the wizened wizard.

“Ah, right, well, sit down, and we will have a look after the meeting.” Pettigrew set his papers on the table as he took a seat, trying to avoid Harry’s baring teeth, and Snape’s leering sneer.

Kingsley spoke. “I believe it would be safest if we sent Harry to the ministry. The Unspeakables there will know—”

“Ah, but that is where we falter. The ministry is very close to Voldemort. Too close, in fact. No, we cannot place him so near their grasps.”

“But surely the Death Eaters have not been able to infiltrate the Department of Mysteries as well?” Mrs. Weasley asked, alarmed by the prospect.

“I only said it was too close...no, we cannot do this. The Death Eaters must not be able to find Harry. I will arrange his disguise. I daresay his build is quite different from our Harry’s.”

“But none of us know anything about dimension hopping!” exclaimed Mrs. Weasley. The room seemed to agree, but Harry’s father had turned pale, and his head was shaking hard, vehemently.

“No, no, no.” Harry watched as his father mouthed those words, insistent.

“No one but Lily Potter. As you may recall, she was an Unspeakable.”

“But there is no way that she would be able to...I’m mean, her condition...” Pettigrew trailed off when he noticed James, sitting in the corner and glaring at him. Harry’s poisonous expression slowly morphed to one of confusion.

“Yes, she will,” Dumbledore said firmly. He glanced back down at Harry, who noticed that the headmaster’s twinkle was all but gone. “She will have to treat him. I do believe she will be willing...” He glanced at James Potter, who though now covered in a shroud of grief, nodded.

“Harry? I think you have some explaining to do, as well as I, but I will spare you this room full of people. We’ll talk tomorrow. Until then...” Dumbledore tapped Harry’s head. For a moment, Harry felt as if his blood had been replaced with boiling water, his skin rippled and his insides burned. He knelt a bit as the pain reached its peak, before dissolving.

Dumbledore conjured a mirror so that Harry could see the changes. Harry’s messy raven locks were now short and thick, and they curled slightly at the ends. His eyes were still green, but they had been subdued to an olive color. His skin had tanned to a lighter brown color.

It was subtle, not enough of a difference even for Moody’s suspicious eye.

“James, will take you to your room?”

Harry watched his father apprehensively as he stood and headed towards the door. His firm muscular build was miles away from Harry’s skinny, short stature.

“This meeting is over. Now, about those papers...”

The father and son walked down the hall and paused when they reached another carved wooden door. “This is it,” said James. He moved around, trying to avoid Harry’s shrewd eyes. Harry went ahead and opened the door.

The room was enormous with clothes were still strewn about, as if the occupant still lived there.

“This is the other Harry’s room,” said Harry’s father awkwardly. “I guess I’ll call you down for dinner?” It seemed more of a question, for the two looked at each other as if expecting a bit more.

“Yeah,” Harry replied as he scuffed his feet on the wooden floor, “that sounds about right.”

His father turned and headed down the corridor, leaving Harry to think—to think about how incredibly unfair life was; to think about Peter Pettigrew, Sirius, his father, and his mother’s mysterious condition...

Alternate

“Harry Potter.”

A cruel, crystalline voice startled Harry enough that he dropped his wand. He quickly bent to pick it up.

“Dropping your wand when faced with an obstacle? That could be quite dangerous, Harry.”

He turned to face the Dark Lord. A sliver of silver could be glimpsed beneath Harry’s large black hood that shaded his face from view.

“I wasn’t aware that you were an obstacle.” Harry spoke; his words becoming the smooth drawl that helped him blend with his Slytherin surroundings.

The Dark Lord smiled. His yellowed teeth glistened, and his tight, leathery skin strained against the pull of his lips. “Ah, Harry, how I’ve missed your Gryffindor cheek. These past couple days have been just *dreadfully* dull without you. Of course, Severus did say that you may be able to return through the mark, though, curiously enough, he didn’t think you’d be smart enough to try. How he underestimates you. Yes, you will be his downfall.”

“Or he will be yours,” added Harry impulsively. Behind his mask he grimaced before explaining, “Dumbledore trusts him for a reason. We can’t lose because of that sniveling double-crosser!”

The Dark Lord’s smile faded, and an ugly scowl took over his face. “You speak too bluntly, Harry,” he whispered, as his wand slipped from the front of his robes into his hand. “Your words have become repetitive to me. Though Dumbledore, the old fool, may have some

grounds for trusting Severus, I have sufficient proof that tells *me* otherwise. And, I must remind you that I could crush the ministry, that school, this country in mere seconds! No one will be defeating me anytime soon. No, no I have my power, and it will only grow as the people learn to love me..."

"Of course, M'Lord." Harry kneeled in an apology. His forehead hit the floors with a dull thump. "You did mention that Snape had planned to test his potion on me, one that was not yet perfected?"

"I had my reasons, though now that the other one has escaped, my plans have backfired a bit. No matter. Harry, what do think of me, giving you your first mission?" The Dark Lord's greedy smile startled Harry a moment, though the prospect of being able to leave the Dark Lord's fortress excited him.

"Please, My Lord, I am at your service!"

"Good, we will discuss this later. Your chamber has already been set up—ah, Severus, so nice of you to finally show up here, at my newest humble abode."

Snape shifted so that the Dark Lord could see him better in the receding evening light that burst through the overhead window into the dome-shaped throne room.

Harry ripped his gaze away from the Slytherin Head of House, the traitor who worked for Dumbledore. Instead, he studied the pattern of the black granite floors, the waves that seemed almost to move in response to his feet.

"I've got news, M'Lord." Snape's drawl broke through Harry's barrier. "They've obtained the information they wanted, with regards to transportation."

"But I thought the rat was guarding those," the Dark Lord mumbled as he stroked the bare clef of his chin.

"He was, My Lord, but I'm afraid he gave them to Dumbledore. My guess is that the pressure became much too bothersome for his tiny little mind. Or, perhaps he has finally slipped to the other side?"

"You may be correct on that one, Severus. Yes, I believe I have lost the use of his services."

"No," Harry interrupted, "he's a rat, but he's a rat on the other side! *Snivellus* is only trying to convince you otherwise!" The Dark Lord scowled in Harry's direction, but Snape's blank façade never changed. It remained stoic, hard enough that a stake and hammer could not budge past its barricade.

"I can tell treachery better than you know, Potter." Harry silenced when he noticed the Dark Lord's wand, glistening in the palm of his hand.

"Go to your rooms, Potter," the Dark Lord commanded. "Snape, take him there. Make sure he doesn't take any detours."

"To where?" The words fell out of Harry's mouth before he could stop them.

"Ah, Harry, Harry, you have returned to our dimension for a taste, perhaps? Is that what you wanted?"

Harry shivered as he eyed the Dark Lord's wand, though he did not dare betray his fear. He knew that he couldn't avoid it now—the Dark Lord's threats were always sincere, no matter how underhanded they sometimes seemed. "I don't believe it would have been too hard to taste your mighty power in the other dimension. Your twin seemed intent on hurting me." Snape peered at Harry curiously out of the corner of his eyes.

The Dark Lord, for a moment, did not say anything. "So, it would seem, as if *my twin* were searching for this other Harry?"

"Yeah, I think he was—Bella and Mr. Malfoy captured me and brought me to him. The Order had come to fight, but we managed to escape to your lair." Harry straightened a bit, hoping that perhaps the Dark Lord may forget the punishment.

"Interesting." The word left no room for any further comments, though the Dark Lord's eyes closed for a brief second. "*Crucio!*"

The sudden, intense pain only lasted seconds, long enough for Harry to let out a rip-roaring scream that echoed off the walls of the throne room, as the Dark Lord's curse tore apart his insides and stretched every limb of his body.

He panted for moments after the curse was lifted.

"It amazes me how much the curse affects you, more so than others, even Draco. It must be because of your *mudblood* mother."

Harry winced as he thought of his family, something he had recently taken to forgetting altogether, especially after...

"Though, curiously enough, that doesn't seem to affect you, Severus, does it?"

"It would seem as though it does not," agreed Snape, his head bowed in a confirmation.

"Then, what exactly would it be? Your *pampered* life before you found us? Oh, Severus, I think he deserves another bout, just for that, don't you?"

"Of course, My Lord." Harry scowled. Blood dripped from his mouth, smearing his silver mask and landing on the marble floors.

"Please do the honors, Severus."

Snivellus did not hesitate. "*Crucio*." The cruel words slipped from his mouth.

Again, Harry felt the tearing pain, though it was dulled, not nearly as powerful as the Dark Lord's. Until, that is, the pain never stopped, as Snape kept his wand trained on Harry. His heart began to throb and pull, as if the tubes were breaking, being stretched to their limit. Harry's screams faltered as his throat clogged with the rusty taste of blood—the only bits that remained from his rampage months ago. He hadn't suffered this pain for months now.

The curse faded as the minutes passed, though the pain did not.

"The best thing about cursing a vampire is that they are harder to kill," Snape whispered from above Harry's still, choking form.

"Ah, I quite agree," The Dark Lord stepped from his throne and approached Harry's prostrate body. "Now, please carry the fool to his rooms. I do hope that he has learned his lesson."

"Teenagers are hard to deal with, My Lord. Your intentions were well-based, though I hope I am not too bold when I admit that I still have doubts that he will be able to sustain as a Death Eater. Not even Draco has the mark yet."

"Yes, those years are difficult, for some," agreed the Dark Lord as he swept out of the room.

Snape looked down at Harry's form, his shallow breathing and fluttering eyes. "*Mobilicorpus!*"

Harry felt his center of gravity switch and his hood fall from his head. His long raven locks stuck out in all directions, wild and untamed. His mask still stayed on firmly, its mold contorted in a grotesque expression of a grimace.

Snape's footsteps echoed down the corridor as his robes swished behind him. Harry trailed a good two yards away, floating behind Snape on an invisible leash. He felt a dull thump as his world was brought back to focus. He lay on a bed now, with a blanket sitting heavily on his body.

The lights went out as he slid into a nightmare.

Alternate

Mabel could not use her cloak, as she had lent it to Tonks for the mission, but she managed to wriggle into the extensive ventilation system of Godric's Hallow. They were narrow, and she was forced to squeeze her large waist into the one that overlooked the meeting room. The stone was slit here, enough for her eye to peak through, and for her to hear the dull chatter.

“Eww,” she whispered as she attempted to roll herself into a tighter ball, trying to avoid the slimy walls.

She scowled at Snape as she learned of his potion’s ruthless affects. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried not to imagine the horrible fate the may befall the real Harry. No tears, she thought fiercely as her eyes moistened. Not today. Even if he was a Death Eater, her Harry would come home—he’d come back; he’d get over that stupid Gryffindor mentality that she admired so much.

In the light of the meeting room, she noticed the changes in Harry. His build was thin and bony, and his face was gaunt. His hair was a nest of untamed, greasy curls that traveled past his neck. The only thing that remained was his vivid green eyes, hidden behind round-rimmed glasses.

The meeting ended quickly, and her eyes trailed each member as they left through the floo. Moody gave Dumbledore a silent nod towards her hiding spot.

He knew.

She had been discovered! She watched as that mismatched eye swiveled in her direction for a moment, before he left. She had never been caught before! Every impulsive move she had ever done was calculated. She couldn’t help but slip into this meeting, even knowing that Moody, who was rarely in attendance these days, may see her. She had managed to slip past anyone last time...

Her mind frantically searched for a way out of the mess. But it was too late. When the room had emptied, Dumbledore frowned at her sternly, his head tilted upwards towards her formerly secret vent.

Sighing in defeat, she shakily lifted the vent and slipped her legs through first. She dropped the rest of her body through, though her thighs scraped the rough edges. Her hands grabbed the sides of the vent, reluctant to let go and fall to wooden floors. She dropped in a mess of limbs, her ankle sore from the rough landing.

She faced Dumbledore. Her black hair was messy, her piercing eyes frantic, and the silk robes that covered her short, stocky build were wet and snagged.

"I've finished my next spell," began the pearl-haired man, "however, I am afraid Snape is still working on the potion to match it. We will see if this one works smoother, this time. Your night is approaching. Two months from now, we will see if we have found an adequate treatment."

Maeby stood still for a moment, at a loss for what to say. She wasn't about to ask for a reproach of some sort. "So Orion's belt will align with the moon? I think that's the next star pattern," she said. Her heart staggered as she realized that the night she was to turn would come earlier than she had previously calculated.

"Yes, yes it is."

There was a silence in which Maeby noticed that Dumbledore's twinkle had returned.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"Will you do it again?"

"No, no I will not," she said earnestly, though her thoughts told her otherwise.

Dumbledore grinned slightly, his mouth curving at both ends as he approached Mabel and put his wrinkled hands on her shoulders. "Your father would be more than proud to learn of your act of kindness today. You saved his life."

And Harry's. That *fake* Harry's, she added silently.

"I assure you that had it been Sirius at your age, and in your position, he would have rushed after you, without thinking about finding a real Auror for the job."

But that's all Maeby ever did. *Think*. Never had she done something brave and irrational, never had she been daring enough to go after

something on her own. How did Dumbledore know that she wouldn't have been able to do it herself? Why did she always have to reflect on her every movement? Why couldn't she ever just *do*.

The discord between Maeby and her father had started right after she had been sorted into Ravenclaw, and she had spent the last four years trying to prove she was every bit a Gryffindor as her father. Her grades had always dipped lower than her fellow housemates, but her "impulsive" decisions just were never quite impulsive enough.

"The password to floo to my office is Ton-Tongue Toffee," murmured Dumbledore, his twinkle in full-blast.

"Ton-Tongue Toffee? I've never heard of that candy before." Maeby wondered dimly why Dumbledore would give her the password to his office.

Dumbledore chuckled. "You can get them from the Weasley twins."

"The Weasleys? I thought I wasn't allowed to bring any of their stuff on school property?"

Dumbledore winked. "We'll see then, won't we? Feel free to floo by my office any time, especially on Wednesday from eleven to twelve."

"Tomorrow? Why in the world..."

Dumbledore winked again.

"...I still don't know what you are saying here..."

"You are in Ravenclaw, aren't you, Miss Black?"

She blushed, secretly pleased. "Of course I am, Professor."

"Then, please come, but do make sure you have permission from your father."

"Oh, yeah, that shouldn't be too hard," she said, though she knew that her father never cared less—that she had become accustomed

to leaving whenever and wherever she wanted, even during these rough times.

She watched Dumbledore grab some of his floo power. “Oh, how I despise the floo,” he said crossly, reminding Maeby of Christopher when he was four. Dumbledore threw the powder into the fire and stepped into the green flames. “Ton-Tongue Toffees!”

She glanced around the empty meeting room until her gaze caught something strange—a small beetle, one that she had never seen the likes of in the area. She approached it cautiously and let out her hand so that it could climb up her finger. “Well, now, aren’t you adorable,” she cooed, examining the strange markings.

She took it home with her, wondering at what such a beetle’s diet would consist of—leaves, perhaps? Or maybe worms?

A very annoyed Rita Skeeter had no idea what she was in for.

Thanks to all my wonderful reviewers so far! Please leave one if you have time.

Kat